

DPW UPDATE

March 2002

Trailblazing with Davis and Wirick

By Jessica Eslinger, Staff Writer

Hikers and campers can explore the outdoors a little easier thanks to DPW's, Tom Davis and Steve Wirick. Both are active members of the Laguna Mountain Volunteer Association, a non-profit organization that works with the United States Forest Service (USFS) to preserve wilderness in the western United States.

Davis and Wirick work alongside some 150 other volunteers maintaining trails, revising park maps, patrolling recreation areas and managing the volunteer center on top of Laguna Mountain.



Davis, of Field Engineering, joined the Laguna Mountain Volunteers in 1989 to enhance the local environment and make use of recreational opportunities. Wirick, DPW Financial Services Manager, became a team member in 1990 for the same reasons, and the two have been volunteer comrades ever since.

Tom Davis

"Being a volunteer for this association defines who we are and what we stand for," said Davis. "We work hard and we play hard."



They've helped construct several trails including the two-mile Secret Canyon and five-mile Big Laguna Trails. During trail construction, Davis and Wirick remove all boulders, rocks, brush and weeds from the path by hand, rather than bringing in destructive machinery. Although it can be a long and tedious process, they both agree that the finished product is well worth it.

"I enjoy hiking," Wirick says, "and volunteering allows me to give back to the environment for the use I'm getting out of it."

Steve Wirick

They also participate in special resource management projects such as erosion control and historic site restoration, in addition to volunteer firefighting.



Davis and Wirick removing rocks and trip hazards from the Pacific Crest Trail

Once a year, the USFS sends six to 10 members on an "off-district trip." These excursions to primitive locations are designed to combat the environmental hazards of a particular forest area. However, different environments call for different hand-crafted tools and strategies.

"We're not professionals, but we learn how to effectively maintain trail areas in many locations," Wirick said.

In one instance, the two men and several others were on an excursion to a secluded section of the Sierra National Forest. A six-foot diameter tree had fallen on a hiking path, causing visitors to detour around it and destroy surrounding natural habitat.

They spent an entire day working a cross-cut two-man saw until the trunk had been cut enough to remove from the path.

Laguna Mountain Volunteers also have a little "playtime." There are lots of social events, not to mention weekend getaways, where awards are presented to members for their hours of contribution. Davis recently received an elite volunteer belt buckle for his 2,000 hours of service. Wirick is 100 hours away from that peak, and both have been granted numerous awards and Recreation Passes.

Davis and Wirick are a little humble about their accomplishments. Even so, their contributions have made a visible difference in the lives of the hikers, bikers, campers and naturalists who visit Laguna Mountain and other National Forest areas.

DPW UPDATE

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Division News

Engineering

ESU: More Than DPW, Birds & Toads

Environmental Services Unit (ESU) sounds like a group of people protecting air and water quality. It is that, but it's a whole lot more.

"We are a resource for the County because we have the knowledge and skill to get projects through the complicated environmental process," said Unit Manager Nelson Olivas.

When Olivas says "County," he doesn't mean the Public Works part of it. ESU provides services to other departments such as Parks & Recreation, General Services, Probation, Sheriff, Housing Commission and more.

Their work is more than just looking out for endangered birds, butterflies and toads. The staff of 13 includes biologists, "generalists," archeologists and support staff. Olivas says their work is not just finding problems but also finding solutions. ESU's concerned with noise and visual impacts of a project, community character, traffic, air and water quality.

Whether it's building a new library or juvenile detention facility, improvements to low-cost housing or planning a Sheriff's sub-station, ESU is ready to help.

Land

Construction on runway and taxiway improvements at Ramona Airport is underway after years of anticipation.

Extension of the runway 1,000 feet allows larger fire fighting aircraft to take off with heavier loads. Ramona is home to the California Department of Forestry and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) aerial fire attack base, the busiest such facility in the nation. USFS plans to convert its aging fleet of DC-4 fire bombers to much larger C-130 Hercules aircraft and those planes need a longer runway, Jenkins said.

"We've overcome some major hurdles to get where we are today," said Airports Director Rick Jenkins.



Blast paves way for improvements at Ramona Airport (photo by Richard Selinger)

Issues such as vernal pools and the discovery of endangered species delayed much needed improvements such as a larger runway and better taxiway.

Included in the \$5 million project are runway and taxiway extension and resurfacing, a new run-up area at the east end of the taxiway, a new compass rose, realignment of the south taxiway and drainage improvements. Work is scheduled for completion in May.

Other improvements planned for Ramona include a new sewer line and traffic control tower.

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Management

Retirement enhancements are a reality and the higher than normal number of retirees means job vacancies throughout the County. Our Personnel office estimates about five percent of DPW's staff may take advantage of the new benefits.

But that doesn't mean long-lasting holes in the org chart. When changes were announced, DPW Director John Snyder called for a succession plan to ensure a smooth transition. Under the plan, Personnel staff began recruiting for positions known to be vacated soon and placed advertisements to announce openings.

"We're looking forward to filling vacancies with top notch people as quickly as possible," Snyder said. "We'll do that through promotions and outside recruitments."

New retirement benefits kick in March 8.